

## *Patty Murray*

*1950–*

UNITED STATES SENATOR

DEMOCRAT FROM WASHINGTON

*1993–*



Image courtesy of the Member

**PATTY MURRAY NEVER PLANNED TO ENTER POLITICS**, but today she is serving her third term in the U.S. Senate as a member of the Democratic leadership. From the classroom to the Congress, Patty Murray has been an effective advocate for Washington's working families and a national leader on port security, veterans issues, transportation, education, health care, and economic development. In 1992 she became the first Washington woman elected to the U.S. Senate. A parent, former preschool teacher and state legislator, Murray is known for her down-to-earth, determined style. She is the Ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, Judiciary, and H.U.D.; and the Ranking Member of the Employment, Safety, and Training Subcommittee. She serves in the Democratic leadership as the Assistant Floor Leader.<sup>1</sup>

Patty Johns was born in Bothell, Washington, on October 11, 1950, to David L. Johns and Beverly A. McLaughlin Johns. In June 1972, after graduating from Washington State University, she married Robert R. Murray. The Murrays raised two children, Randy and Sara. Senator Murray volunteered as a pre-school teacher at a parent-child cooperative education program in which her children were enrolled. In 1980, the Washington state legislature eliminated the program, and Murray launched a grassroots campaign to save it. During that fight, a male legislator dismissed her by saying, "You can't make a difference; you're just a mom in tennis shoes."<sup>2</sup> In response, Murray worked to build a grassroots coalition of 13,000 parents who saved the program. Murray was then elected to the Shoreline school board. In 1988, Murray won election to the Washington state senate where she served until 1992, working as the Democratic whip for her final two years.

In 1992, Murray saw that working families did not have a voice in the U.S. Senate, so she challenged Democratic incumbent Senator Brock Adams for the Democratic primary. Murray spoke on middle-class concerns. "Mom in tennis shoes" became a campaign theme. Adams announced his retirement before the primary, and Murray beat four other opponents.<sup>3</sup> In the general election, she beat five-term GOP Representative Rod Chandler with 54 percent of the vote. Murray's campaign focused on healthcare, improved schools, a woman's right to choose, and economic help for working families.<sup>4</sup>

Murray entered the 103rd Congress (1993–1995) and received assignments on three committees: Appropriations; Budget; and Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999) she dropped the third assignment for a spot on the Labor and Human Resources Committee (later renamed Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions). By the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Murray had become Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Employment, Safety, and Training.

Murray has taken a special interest in veterans issues. Her father served in World War II, and during college Murray volunteered at the Veterans' Administration (VA) hospital in Seattle. She asked to serve on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and became the first woman ever to serve on that committee. Murray has worked to save VA hospitals from being closed and to improve services for returning Guard and Reserve members. Murray earned a seat on the Senate Select Committee on Ethics during the 105th Congress. In the 107th Congress (2001–2003), while Democrats briefly controlled the chamber, Murray chaired the Transportation Subcommittee of Appropriations. She was the panel's Ranking Democrat in the 108th Congress and 109th Congress (2005–2007).

Senator Murray has focused on issues vital to her state. She has worked to improve transportation, agriculture, and trade. She has helped secure federal funding to clean up the Hanford nuclear facility and protected the Hanford Reach section of the Columbia River. Washington is the nation's most trade-dependent state, and Murray worked to open foreign markets to the state's many exports. Senator Murray has worked to improve security at the U.S. northern border. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Murray worked to improve port security by increasing funding for the Coast Guard and developing legislation to improve cargo security.<sup>5</sup> In 1998, Murray led the Senate fight to hire 100,000 new teachers to reduce classroom overcrowding.<sup>6</sup> She worked to pass and reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act and is working to ban deadly asbestos. After a 1999 pipeline explosion killed three people in her state, Murray led a national effort that dramatically improved pipeline safety.

In 1998, Murray won re-election by defeating two-term U.S. Representative Linda Smith with 58 percent of the vote. By the 107th Congress, Murray was Washington State's senior Senator, and Democratic leaders chose her as the first woman to head the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. In 2004, she won a third term, capturing 55 percent of the vote against Congressman George Nethercutt.<sup>7</sup>

## FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, "Patty Murray," <http://www.bioguide.congress.gov>

Mikulski, Barbara, et al. *Nine and Counting: The Women of the Senate* (New York: Morrow, 2000).

## MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

University of Oklahoma (Norman, OK), The Julian P. Kanter Commercial Archive, Department of Communication. *Video cassettes*: two video cassettes. Includes nine commercials used during Patty Murray's campaign.

## NOTES

- 1 "Official Biography of Patty Murray," <http://murray.senate.gov>. (accessed 12 December 2004).
- 2 Timothy Egan, "Another Win by a Woman, This One 'Mom,'" 17 September 1992, *New York Times*: A16.
- 3 Barbara Mikulski et al., *Nine and Counting* (New York: Morrow, 2000): 45; Egan, "Another Win by a Woman, This One 'Mom.'"
- 4 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/index.html>.
- 5 *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 1063; "Official Biography of Patty Murray," <http://murray.senate.gov>.
- 6 Mikulski et al., *Nine and Counting*: 152.
- 7 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/index.html>.